

Ihsan A. Walker

New Jersey- Newark

My name is Ihsan Alsamine Walker, I was born in Newark, New Jersey on February 28, 1998. I have five other siblings: Ryshone (brother), Ali (brother), Shakee (brother), Omar (brother), Shakeena (sister), and me (yes, I'm the baby). My family lived in a three family house with my grandmother on the first floor, eldest aunt on the second floor, and my family on the third. Growing up in New Jersey was not the easiest, as you could imagine with such a huge family. Nonetheless it also made me value my family even though.

As unoccupied little boys and girls, my cousins and I were always in trouble! Just downright reckless. There was no penchant for education or religion; this is where my mom and dad fought for change for our family. My mom's first husband was from Cincinnati, Ohio and my eldest brother Ryshone lived there as well. He was an adult by this time, but he influenced my mom to come to Cincinnati. This is where the adventure began!

Ohio- Cincinnati

We arrived in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2005 with our luggage and five hundred dollars given to us by our previous church. We'd soon find ourselves at the Travelodge in Lockland. It was there that would meet our future pastors. Word of Victory International was an upcoming church at the time and used the space provided by the Travelodge as their sanctuary. Pastors Oswald and Gloria Campbell were the first to financially and spiritually assist us in our journey. By way of their now deceased daughter, Carmen D. Myrick-Perry, we would become privy to education and college life.

Later we would move to Evanston and then Winton Hills. I attended Winton Hills Academy for third through eighth grade. My teachers were so amazing and helpful, they were my second set of parents. I still remember the words they spoke to me. "Ihsan, you need to learn to turn on and off," said Julie Dellecave. "You seriously need to be quiet and do your work," said Robin Day. "Ihsan, boo, please get your act together," said Lisa Warmack. It was at Winton Hills Academy that I would be introduced to the best high school in Cincinnati—St. Xavier H.S.

Joe Wilmers, now retired, would help me to get involved with CSP (Companion Scholars Program). This program is four week study course at St. Xavier H.S. The program prepares grade-school boys for the HSPT (High School Placement Test) specifically for St. Xavier H.S. I was now an incoming freshmen and had applied to St. Xavier H.S. and was now waiting for my letter of acceptance or denial. My stomach was full of butterflies, I had so wanted to attend St. X, and I loved everything about it. With much hard work and waiting, I finally received a letter in the mail—I was accepted!

As an incoming freshmen I was very outgoing. I was in a whole new arena of people. I've always liked people and experiencing different atmospheres. I had inherited my great gift

singing and had sang at church many of times, but to now sing at an all-boys school was scary to me. It was scary because I thought I would be made fun because tons of guys sing in Choir, but it was actually because of music literacy—I had none. Most of the people in choir had sang before in some quartet or group, I had only sang at church. I was very intimidated by this. Mr. Thomsen, who would then become my mentor, helped me in this field. He assured me that I'd learn. He said that learning the literacy was the easy part, and that possessing the passion that I had, was the hard part. I would take private vocal lesson with his wife who was a professional opera singer. I would soon increase in confidence in school and literacy music.

As the years went by I participated in many competitions with Choir and won many awards abroad. I soon would start participating in Theater and eventually, private events. In my sophomore year, I was specially selected for a scholarship by way of Bob Castellini, owner of the Cincinnati Reds. Shortly afterwards I would be singing the National Anthem for the Cincinnati Reds.

Religion is also a very important part of my life. My father is Muslim and mom is Christian. This is why my siblings and I have Islamic names. After moving to Cincinnati and joining Word of Victory International Church. I soon became the Worship Leader. At the age of 12, I attended Leadership Classes at Word of Victory International Church. After many classes, on July 27, 2014, at the age of sixteen, I was ordained to the Gospel Ministry as a Youth Minister.

I also participated with Cincinnati Recreation Commission with Miss April Durham. She was an amazing mentor to me (and still is). I started off volunteering with CRC and I would eventually work as a Junior Rec Intern at Winton Hills Recreation Center in 2012. Afterwards, in 2015, I worked as Rec Intern at McKie Recreation Center. This past summer I met Alex Folsom in my interview. He specifically chose me to be his successor for *Youth Commissioner*. This was my first time ever being approached by someone of my age, complimenting me on a professional level. It was very reassuring to me to talk to Alex.

My experiences so far have been many—lots of ups and downs and turns, but they all worked together for my good. They've helped me to be the man I am today. Without the many people in my life and the experiences I've experienced I would not be where I am today. Thank you to the many people who've assisted me in my journey, thank you to myself for not giving up on myself, and thank you God who has blessed me beyond measure.